Patchwork Plays

BY

RACHEL FIELD

AY

Price, net,

PATCHWORK PLAYS

By Rachel Field

HERE are five little plays by one of the best-loved writers for children. They are varied in subject and costume and full of interest. Because the author understands the difficulties of play production she has kept these simple enough for younger children to give without too much help from grown-ups.

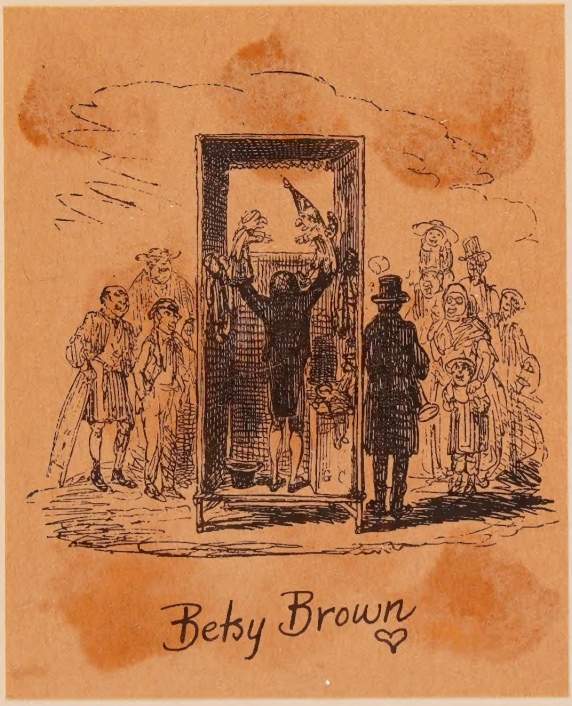
"Polly Patchwork," is dramatized from Rachel Field's popular little book of that name. It tells how Polly's patchwork dress helped her win the spelling match—and you can use as large a cast as the stage will hold.

"Little Square-Toes" is a play about a little girl who is carried away captive from Deerfield by the Indians during the days of King Philip's War. It can be given especially well out of doors.

Old London is the background for "Chimney Sweeps' Holiday," the story of a rich man's son stolen away to become a chimney sweep—and how he is found by his father as he dances with the other sweeps on London Bridge.

Any boy would think it fun to play the part of the unusual and whimsical hero of "The Sentimental Scarecrow."

Illustrations by Rachel Field, the author, give an idea of the type of costumes and the setting for each of the plays.



Betsy Brown

Patchwork Plays

BOOKS BY

Rachel Field

THE POINTED PEOPLE
SIX PLAYS
AN ALPHABET FOR BOYS AND GIRLS
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TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS
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POLLY PATCHWORK
LITTLE DOG TOBY
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HITTY: HER FIRST HUNDRED YEARS
POINTS EAST
PATCHWORK PLAYS

Books Edited by Rachel Field

THE WHITE CAT AND OTHER TALES
AMERICAN FOLK AND
FAIRY TALES

Patchwork Plays

BY

RACHEL FIELD

ILLUSTRATED BY

THE AUTHOR

Junior Books

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TO

MELROSE PLANTATION

WHERE PATCHWORK QUILTS

GROW

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* This play has only girls' parts
** This play has only boys' parts
Numbers II, III, and V may be played outdoors

NOTICE . . . *Please remember that these plays must not be acted without writing to Samuel French & Co., 25 West 45th Street, New York City, for permission. There will be a small royalty charge of two dollars and a half for each performance of any one.*

Polly Patchwork

A PLAY FROM THE STORY BY

Rachel Field

Characters

POLLY

THE GRANDMOTHER

GREAT-AUNT MEHITABEL
GENERAL LAFAYETTE
COUSIN MARIANA GAY
} People in dream

MR. TIPPETT

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS

MARY JANE PETERS

JIMMIE WILLIS

SCHOLARS, VISITORS, MOTHERS, ETC.

SCENES

I

THE INTERIOR OF A COTTAGE

II

THE COTTAGE JUST BEFORE BEDTIME

III

AN OLD-FASHIONED SCHOOLROOM

Polly Patchwork

SCENE I

THE *interior of a cottage. If possible there should be a window and a door and a fireplace. There should be a table and at least two chairs, one a small rocker for the Grandmother; an old chest in one corner, plates and china pitcher on shelf or mantelpiece, and a little cot for Polly to sleep on.*

When the curtain rises the Grandmother is at the window. She has white hair and a shawl, full skirts and an apron. Of course, spectacles.

GRANDMOTHER

There! I can hear the geese flying south. There aren't any more marigolds in the garden, and all the berries are falling from the thorn tree. (*Sighs.*) Yes, winter is nearly here, and Polly will need a new dress to keep her warm.

> (*She gets down the china pitcher, brings it to the table, emptying out the pennies. She sighs as she counts them and sees how few there are.*)

Dear, dear, not nearly enough to buy Polly a dress, though to be sure it doesn't take so many yards to go around her.

> (*Enter Polly with a little basket of red berries. She is rather small and wears an old brown dress with several patches in it.*)

POLLY

Oh, Grandmother, may I have a needle and thread?

GRANDMOTHER (*putting pitcher back*)

What do you want them for, child?

POLLY (*holding out basket*)

I want to string myself a necklace out of these red berries. They look so red and shiny, I'm sure they'll help to keep me warm this winter.

GRANDMOTHER (*shaking her head as she gets the needle and thread from her basket*)

Red beads are all very fine, but they won't keep the wind out like woollen. (*Giving Polly a threaded needle*) We must see what we can find in the old chest.

(*Polly sits down and begins to string her beads. The Grandmother goes over to the chest, opens it, and begins to take out different things: a guitar with faded ribbons and only one string; a very dilapidated high silk hat; a parasol without any handle or with the covering in tatters; a shoe buckle, and any other odds and ends that can be thought of; last of all, at the bottom, a brightly colored patchwork quilt, the "crazy quilt" pattern.*)

GRANDMOTHER (*as she takes things out*)

Well, well, if there isn't that old guitar from down South. *That's* no good to us, not even

the ribbons. (*She puts aside the guitar.*) And here's your grandfather's best hat. (*She dusts it off, but puts it down too.*) He used to wear it every Sunday to church at Cranberry Common. (*Putting down the parasol*) And this will never do to keep out the rain. (*Holding up shoe buckle*) Too bad the other buckle's lost. It would look queer to see only one on your shoes. (*Handles the other things. Finally holds up quilt.*) Look, Polly, the very thing! Not a hole in it and we have quilts to sleep under so this will do nicely for your dress.

POLLY

But, Grandmother, I never saw a dress made out of a quilt before.

GRANDMOTHER (*turning it this way and that and smiling over the quilt*)

It will keep you as warm as toast, and every patch is real silk.

POLLY

But, Grandmother, whoever——

GRANDMOTHER (*paying no attention to her*)

Run out now, Polly, and get a basketful of pine cones to start the fire.

POLLY (*holding up the string of berries*)

Can I put my red beads on now, Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER (*already spreading the quilt out on the table and taking up the scissors*)

Yes, child, but hurry and bring the cones in. It's nearly dark.

(*Polly goes out with her basket. The Grandmother bends over the table with her scissors. She should have her back to the audience, so it will look as if she were really cutting the quilt out. This done,*

she carries it to the rocking chair and begins to sew, rocking and singing all the while.)

GRANDMOTHER (*singing*)

Fold and snip, and snip and fold,
Some are young and some are old.

In and out, and out and in,
Some will dance and some will spin.

Sew and stitch, and stitch and sew,
Some will come and some will go.

Knot and twist, and twist and knot,
Some will wed and some will not.

POLLY (*returning with the cones*)

Here they are, Grandmother, shall I put them on the fire?

GRANDMOTHER (*nodding and continuing her song*)

Fold and snip, and snip and fold,
Some are young and some are old, etc., etc.

(*Polly, in putting cones on, drops some on the floor. She goes over to corner and takes*

an old-fashioned broom to sweep them up. Her Grandmother sees this and stops singing.)

Mercy me, child! You mustn't do that! It's past six o'clock, and don't you remember how many times I've told you it brings bad luck to sweep the floor after the sun goes down?

POLLY (*putting away broom and taking down a primer book from the shelf*)

Then I'll study my spelling lesson to be all ready for the spelling match.

GRANDMOTHER (*not looking up from the sewing*)

What's that you said about a spelling match?

POLLY

Oh, Grandmother, they're having one at school on Friday. It's the last day of the fall term.

GRANDMOTHER

I expect all the School Committee will be there to hear you.

POLLY

Yes, and there's a solid-silver medal for the

one who wins it. (*A pause.*) I wish I could win it.

GRANDMOTHER

But you're not very good at spelling, are you, Polly?

POLLY (*rather sadly*)

Not so very. . . . (*She is standing by the window, and as she looks out she points eagerly.*) Look, there's the little new moon up over the pine tree! (*She shuts her eyes, looks over her left shoulder, and whispers something.*) There! I wished on it. I wished that I'd win the spelling match. Do you think it will help me, Grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER (*sewing away very hard*)

I'm sure I don't know, child.

POLLY (*going to the other chair and sitting down to study her lesson*)

Well, it can't do any harm to have the moon on my side, can it?

CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

THE *cottage just before bedtime. By candlelight. Polly is standing up before her grandmother to have the new dress fitted. It is still not finished, but it is in progress and sticks out stiffly all around Polly, who keeps trying to smooth it down. She does not look as pleased over it as her grandmother, who snips and fits and pins away happily, talking as she works.*

GRANDMOTHER

Stand very still now while I fit this to you. My, my, it was a mercy I found it in time for the spelling match. I wouldn't want you to stand up before everybody in your old one.

POLLY (*twisting her head to see back and trying to flatten the skirt again*)

But, Grandmother, it sticks out so—all around me.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, well, it will flatten down after you've worn it awhile. I guess it won't matter if it

does balloon out a little, the colors are so nice and bright.

POLLY (*sighing*)

Yes, they *are* pretty bright.

GRANDMOTHER (*going on happily, fitting as she talks*)

They call this the crazy-quilt pattern because the pieces are different shapes and sewed together every-which-way. I can remember seeing Great-Aunt Mehitabel making it when I was a little girl no bigger than you. (*Pointing to one of the patches*) Well, now, if there isn't that patch from the Sea Captain's handkerchief.

POLLY (*interested in spite of herself*)

Where?

GRANDMOTHER (*showing her*)

This red one. He gave it to Great-Aunt Mehitabel when she was a little girl. She told me so herself, and how he had a parrot that could whistle "Yankee Doodle" and say, "Trim your sails and face the music." (*The Grandmother should imitate the parrot when she says this.*) And here's the yellow

one from the dress she wore the time she danced with General Lafayette.

POLLY (*showing great surprise*)

Great-Aunt Mehitabel danced?

GRANDMOTHER

I should say she did! She danced the minuet with him right before the Governor and all the rest, and she never missed a step or forgot to keep her toes turned out.

POLLY (*a little more resigned, looks at the front of her dress and points to another patch*)

This one has roses and forget-me-nots on it. It's pretty——

GRANDMOTHER (*breaking in*)

It ought to be, child, it came all the way from Paris and was a bit from Cousin Mariana Gay's best party sash.

POLLY

I never heard of her.

GRANDMOTHER (*who is almost through fitting. She has been on her knees hanging the skirt, but now she sits back on her heels as she tells Polly about it*)

Why, she lived long ago down South, and

they say she was as pretty as her name. That's her guitar over there. She used to sit on her balcony, watching the boats go up and down the Mississippi River, and play and sing, "Listen to the Mocking Bird!" (*The Grandmother finishes hanging the dress and gets up, dusting her knees.*) There, now, that's fitted, and it's time you were in bed.

POLLY (*as her grandmother helps her take off dress*)

Grandmother, I'd just as soon wear my brown dress and my red beads if you shouldn't get this done in time.

GRANDMOTHER (*folding up dress and bringing out Polly's nightgown*)

Who says I won't get it done by Friday? (*Slips nightgown over Polly's head.*)

POLLY (*hopefully*)

But that's to-morrow, and there are still a lot of stitches to sew.

GRANDMOTHER (*smiling to herself as she helps Polly into bed*)

I mean to get it done if my thimble finger drops right off! You just wait and see.

POLLY (*from the bed*)

Good-night, Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER (*tucking her in and then going out with her candle*)

Good-night, child, and pleasant dreams.

(*The stage should be dark for a minute or so after she has gone, and Polly should lie perfectly still in the bed, as if asleep. Then we should hear someone off-stage, calling as the Sea Captain's parrot did:* "Trim your sails and face the music!" *Twice, maybe three times. At each of these calls Polly should start, move, sit up in bed, and rub her eyes. The light in the room should be brighter now, but not too bright, for it must seem like a dream.*)

POLLY (*sleepily*)

That's funny.

(*Then into the light appears Great-Aunt Mehitabel in her old-fashioned dress. If possible she should have General Lafayette with her, and they should go through the steps of the minuet, while Polly looks on with surprise.*)

POLLY (*noticing her feet*)

You're Great-Aunt Mehitabel. You've got your toes turned out just the way Grandmother said.

(*Great Aunt Mehitabel and her partner dance off, very dignified and precise. Polly is just settling back under the bedclothes again when strains of music are heard off-stage, and then Cousin Mariana Gay appears, in a full flowered dress, with the guitar with the yellow ribbons. She is playing on it and singing, "Listen to the Mocking Bird." Polly bows to her from the bed politely.*)

POLLY (*as she enters and before she has begun singing*)

How do you do, Cousin Mariana Gay.

(*Cousin Mariana seats herself on the foot of the bed and begins to play the guitar and sing.*)

COUSIN MARIANA (*singing*)

Listen to the mocking bird—
Listen to the mocking bird—*

*For the music for these words see "The Franklin Square Song Collection," No. 6. Selected by J. P. McCaskey. Harper Brothers, New York.

(*The little girl playing this part may sing one verse and the chorus if she wants, or just part of the chorus, but she should be playing and singing to Polly as the curtain goes down.*)

SCENE III

AN OLD-FASHIONED *schoolroom with maps, blackboard, and wooden benches for the scholars, stage center. Others for the visitors against the wall. Polly is all alone at the rise of the curtain, arrayed in her patchwork dress and looking very miserable. Sound of children's voices outside. Polly looks off in the direction from which they come and half starts to get up.*

POLLY (*to herself*)

Oh, dear me, they're coming in now! They'll all begin to laugh at my dress. I wish I hadn't come. (*Looking toward another door*) I could slip out through the entry. Nobody would see me, and I could stay out on the Common till it was time to go home.

(*She rises and takes a step or two, then stops, listening, for in a lull outside*

comes the voice of the Sea Captain's parrot off-stage saying very distinctly: "Trim your sails and face the music." *It is repeated three times, and Polly returns to her place just as the scholars troop in.*)

ONE GIRL (*pointing*)

Oh, my, just look at Polly!

ANOTHER (*calling*)

See Polly's new dress all made of patches!

(*They gather round and whisper and point and laugh. Then Jimmy Willis pipes up teasingly.*)

JIMMY WILLIS (*singing, alone at first*)

Polly Patchwork, now it's cool,
Wears a crazy-quilt to school.
Thinks she'll win the spelling match
In her dress of patch—patch—patch!

(*The others join in, and Polly hangs her head at first. Then, remembering the Sea Captain's parrot, she raises it and sits very straight.*

The teacher now enters, followed by the School Committee. There are three or four of them, the oldest one a man with whiskers and spectacles. Several parents have

also come to look on. There can be as many or as few of these as desired. All wear old-fashioned clothes: the men have long coats, waistcoats, etc.; the women shawls, bonnets, capes, and mitts.)

TEACHER (*standing behind her desk, rapping on it with ruler*)

The class will please come to order. Everybody eyes front; hands folded. Don't fidget so, Rebecca Jones, and Willie Simpson, take your feet out of the aisle. That's better. Now you all know this is the last day of the fall term and a very important one for all of us, for the School Committee has come all the way from Cranberry Common to be here this afternoon and listen to the spelling match. Mr. Tippet will say a few words to you before we begin.

(*She sits down, and the oldest member of the School Committee rises, wipes his spectacles, clears his throat, and begins.*)

MR. TIPPET (*very pompously*)

Boys and Girls (*clearing throat*)—a-hem, a-hem—we have come all the way over

here this afternoon to see how much you know about spelling. Spelling—a-hem, a-hem—is a very important subject for everyone to know. I once heard of a boy who wrote "h-o-l-e" in a letter when he meant "w-h-O-l-e," and it changed his entire life. So, boys and girls, you can't be too careful about spelling, and that is why—a-hem, a-hem—we have decided to present this medal to the best speller here (*He takes medal from box in his pocket and holds it up on its ribbon.*)—this solid-silver medal that any one of you may be proud to wear. (*The scholars clap and lean forward to see.*)

TEACHER (*reprovingly*)

Back in your places, now. You can look at it afterward. (*Hands book.*) I have asked Mr. Tippet to give out the words. (*Beckoning to them*) Line up in your places now as I call your names.

(*As she calls each name a pupil rises and takes his or her place.*)

Mary Jane Peters.
Jimmy Willis.

Rebecca Jones.
Willie Simpson.
Fanny Jenkins.
Peter Davis.
Lucy Smith.
Jerry Bush.

(*There can be as many more as the director thinks best, but Polly must be called last.*)

Polly Mehitabel Gay.

(*As she takes her place at the foot of the line there are smothered snickers from her mates, and they peer at her and make remarks to one another.*)

One Visitor (*low to her neighbor*)

What child is that in such an outlandish dress?

Another

Oh, that's little Polly Gay. Did you ever see such a figure as she cuts?

Another

I declare if it isn't a crazy quilt she's got on. Whoever heard of such a thing?

(Polly hears them and hangs her head. Tries to press her skirts down with her hands, but they will not flatten. As she does so she smooths the yellow patch, the one that had belonged to Great-Aunt Mehitabel. She touches this so that it is plain to the audience that she is remembering the minuet and what her grandmother told her. Then very carefully she turns out her toes and holds up her head. This should all be done slowly so that people looking on will understand what is going on in Polly's mind.)

TEACHER

Ready now, boys and girls. (*She nods to Mr. Tippet to begin.*)

(He clears his throat and holds up the spelling book close to his spectacles, repeating the word very slowly and then peering over the book at the pupil who is to spell it. It is a very solemn occasion, and everybody listens breathlessly. The Teacher nods when a word is spelled right and looks sorry when it is wrong. Mr. Tippet says "Correct," if it is right, and "Next" if it is wrong, in which case

the scholar goes to his old seat. The spelling match can be as long as it seems best, beginning with such simple words as "sure, such, school, scissors" [for Polly after her neighbor has missed it], "cheese, receive, believe, neighbor, weigh," etc., etc., getting more difficult, and more and more children drop out, till only six are left with Polly still at the foot.)

MR. TIPPET (*clearing his throat very loudly*)
Spell MISSISSIPPI.

MARY JANE PETERS (*begins all right then falters*)
Mis—is—i—— (*She goes down crying.*)

TEACHER
You try, Jimmy.

JIMMY (*very cocksure at beginning and then getting all mixed up*)
Mis-s-s-s-s-s-s-s (*He ends sounding like a hissing goose*)

MR. TIPPET (*shaking his head*)
Next.

(*The others try, and each one forgets either an S an I or a P. At last Polly is*

left all alone. The visitors and pupils all lean forward to listen. The schoolroom is very still. Polly hesitates, it is plain she doesn't know how the letters ought to go. She looks down at her dress and sees the flowered patch, which she touches as she begins.)

POLLY (*begins bravely*)

Mi—— (*She stops, then says in a lower voice, yet loud enough for the audience to hear.*) Oh, Cousin Mariana Gay, please help me to spell it right.

(*Strains of "Listen to the Mocking Bird" sound softly, and then a voice off-stage saying distinctly: "Mi-double s—i double s—i—double p—i." Polly repeats it after her slowly and distinctly. Adds "Oh, thank you, Cousin Mariana Gay." When she gets through everyone claps and stamps his feet. The pupils all gather round her, and the teacher takes her hand and leads her up to Mr. Tippet. He brings out the medal, and with a deep bow presents it to her while all the rest look on enviously.*)

MR. TIPPET (*shaking hands*)

You are a very little girl to spell such a long word correctly.

TEACHER

Yes, Polly, I had never suspected you were such a good speller.

JIMMY WILLIS

Let me have a look at it, Polly, will you?

OTHER CHILDREN (*crowding closer*)

And me—and me—I want to see it, etc., etc.

(*Just here Polly's grandmother appears in the doorway, with a shawl and bonnet on, basket on her arm.*)

POLLY (*seeing her*)

Why, Grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER

I thought I'd just stop by and see who won the spelling match. What's that you've got around your neck, child?

TEACHER

I am happy to tell you that Polly spelled a word all the others failed on.

GRANDMOTHER (*pleased*)

My, my, just think of that now.

POLLY (*going to her*)

It was Mississippi, Grandmother. (*Explaining earnestly*) But I wouldn't have won it except for Cousin Mariana Gay and the Sea Captain's parrot, and Great-Aunt Mehitabel——

MR. TIPPET (*puzzled, with his hand to his ear*)

What's that the child is saying?

POLLY (*going on*)

I didn't really know where all the s'es and I's came, but I looked down at Cousin Mariana's patch hard (*she points to it on the front of her dress*), and I could see her as plain as plain on her balcony, playing the guitar and singing. So I asked her to help me, and she did. I said it right after her like this (*spelling as before*): Mi—double s, i—double s, i double p—i.

GRANDMOTHER (*listening and nodding her head wisely*)

Well, now, what did I tell you? It isn't everybody can have an experienced dress

like yours to give them advice when they need it. (*To the others*) We must go home now. Get your things, Polly, and run on ahead of me to get a basketful of cones to start the fire!

CURTAIN

"LITTLE SQUARE-TOES"

A PLAY OF OLD DEERFIELD

"Their savage captors had set them free
From their freedom's old captivity.
Shiftless, serene, agile, and wild
Grew many a stiff New England child,
And Commissions might sit and mothers might
yearn,
*But the little square toes would not return."**

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*These lines and the title are used by permission of Elizabeth Coatsworth from her book, "Compass Rose," published by Coward-McCann.

Characters

THANKFUL TURNER DEBORAH GREENE CHARITY ALLEN MARTHA ALLEN	*Little Girls of Deerfield*
REMEMBRANCE SHELDON	*Once of Deerfield, now of the Woods.*

TIME: *The early seventeen hundreds.*

"Little Square-Toes"

SCENE

A CLEARING *near the village of Deerfield in Massachusetts in the days of the Indian Wars. The season is late summer; the hour not long before sunset. If possible the stage should have a tree stump or two and some bushes or it may be played out of doors in a clearing. Two of the little village girls are on the stage at rise of curtain, in their long dresses of gray or brown homespun, their white aprons, kerchiefs, and caps. They are picking blackberries into baskets, and continue at this in silence for a full minute or so. Then there*

comes a shrill squeal from off-stage, and Martha, the youngest of the four, runs in, her cap on one side, the basket tumbling out of her hands.

MARTHA (*crying out loudly*)

Oh—oh—a snake! Right under my foot!

DEBORAH (*the oldest girl, hurrying to her*)

Hush, Martha, hush. They will hear you at the Stockade and think the Injuns are scalping us.

CHARITY (*her sister, a little older*)

For shame to fear a little harmless snake.

MARTHA

But 'twas a great black fellow! A rattler, I doubt not.

CHARITY (*very scornful*)

A rattler! Whoever heard of a rattler a stone's throw from Deerfield? (*Pointing to overturned basket*) Look there, you've upset your basket and trodden your berries into mush.

THANKFUL (*the fourth child, who has joined them*)

Come, Charity, do not chide your little

sister so. (*Bending over basket*) See, Martha, there be some still safe in the bottom.

MARTHA (*whimpering*)

But 'twas full to the brim. I picked every blackberry myself, and they were finer than Charity's for all she be so much bigger.

DEBORAH

Well, 'tis no good crying over spilled berries. We will help gather these up.

CHARITY (*still rather annoyed*)

And see the great rent in your apron. (*To Deborah*) I told you she was too young to come a-berrying.

DEBORAH (*sagely*)

Mayhap, but here she is. (*Examining the apron*) I could mend it so 'twould scarcely show.

MARTHA (*eagerly*)

Truly, Debby? And will you do it for me?

CHARITY (*from a near-by stump where she has seated herself*)

That she shall not! Our mother would think shame should it come to her ears.

(She continues to sit looking on disapprovingly from the stump while Thankful and Deborah kneel on the grass center stage and pick up the berries. Martha holds her basket while they put them in. A dog's bark sounds faintly in the distance. Thankful lifts her head to listen.)

THANKFUL

Only listen to old Rover. Think you anything can be amiss?

CHARITY (*with relish*)

Mayhap the Injuns have caught him and are cutting off his tail.

MARTHA (*beginning to cry afresh*)

The Injuns—oh, dear, I'm frighted.

DEBORAH (*reassuring her*)

He's but stirred up a woodchuck, most likely, though 'tis not like him to stray so far from us.

THANKFUL

No, nor to bark so strangely. I wish he would come back.

DEBORAH

They'd not have let us leave the Stockade

if 'twere not safe. Ethan Moore and Colonel Chapin have scoured these woods and say there's not a redskin for miles about.

THANKFUL

And 'tis a twelvemonth now since the last raid.

CHARITY

Still you have not forgot what happened to Eunice and Remembrance.

THANKFUL (*shaking her head sorrowfully*)

I know. We pray night and morning for their safe return.

CHARITY

And so do we at our house. But my father shakes his head and says he doubts they are living children to-day.

DEBORAH

My mother says 'twere better they be dead than to fall into the sinful ways of savages and lose all hope of salvation.

THANKFUL

Remembrance and I began our samplers the same day. Mine is finished now, but I doubt hers will ever be.

CHARITY (*complacently*)

I am glad *we* were not carried into captivity to sleep in the woods at night with bears prowling and no warm porridge to eat in winter—ugh! (*She makes a face.*)

DEBORAH (*solemnly*)

And none to care if our souls be in the devil's keeping.

MARTHA (*round eyed, drawing closer*)

The devil—o-o-h, Debby, I'm frighted again.

THANKFUL (*looking behind her*)

So am I. (*A long, shrill bird call sounds.*) What can that be? 'Tis like no bird call I ever heard.

DEBORAH

Nor I. Still, 'twas afar off.

(*The call sounds again, but is still distant.*)

CHARITY (*reprovingly*)

You had best not have mentioned the devil, Deborah. Who knows he is not even now about, ready to spring out of these very woods and tempt us?

MARTHA

Oh, let's go home—now!

DEBORAH

Why, 'tis not sunset yet. They said we might stay till the bell rang.

(*Call sounds once more.*)

THANKFUL

There, did you not hear it again? It makes the gooseflesh creep along my spine.

CHARITY (*tauntingly*)

Some old hoot owl, most likely. I vow you are that timid, Thankful, you would fly from your own shadow.

THANKFUL (*in self-defense*)

That I would not, Charity Allen! And I know 'twas no hoot owl at this time of day.

DEBORAH (*to distract them gets out sewing from her dress pocket*)

Well, 'tis no matter, only see how much I have worked on my sampler. (*Holds it out and the others come closer to examine it.*)

CHARITY

Be this the new one that will have the strawberry and vine-leaf border?

DEBORAH

Yes, two sides are done already. (*Spreading it out on her knee and pointing proudly*) There will be an urn and a weeping willow here, and here a tomahawk, worked in red for blood.

MARTHA (*scared*)

A tomahawk—all blood—o—o—o—h! (*She shudders, comes closer.*)

CHARITY (*pushing her back*)

There must be blood, silly, since 'twill be a memorial to the Injun raids.

DEBORAH

My mother hath promised to dye the thread scarlet as soon as she can trade some of her indigo for cochineal.

THANKFUL

And what words will you work upon it, Deborah?

DEBORAH (*with pride*)

Here it shall read: "Sacred to the memory of Eunice Williams and Remembrance Sheldon of Deerfield, in Massachusetts Bay Colony, reared in piety and ye Christian Faith.

Carried into captivity by ye infamous savages in ye year of our Lorde one thousand seven hundred and four. Wrought in sorrow by their more fortunate playmate Deborah Greene in ye tenth year of her age."

THANKFUL (*admiringly*)

My, but I should not like to work so many words. The alphabet and mine own name were like to have been the death of me. Four times I must needs rip them out and begin afresh.

(*While they have been bending over the sampler a figure has entered stealthily from the bushes at the back, creeping nearer, on moccasined feet. She stands silently listening to their words. She is a little girl about their age, to all outward appearance an Indian, except that her skin is fair and freckled and her hair light brown or sandy. It hangs disordered about her face and shoulders, with bits of bright feather or colored cloth woven into it garishly. Over her deerskin dress are many strings of beads, blue, red, and yellow.*)

CHARITY

I warrant Eunice and Remembrance would be right well pleased to see the honor you do them.

DEBORAH (*shaking her head dolefully*)

Poor lost souls.

(*At this moment the Indian girl, Remembrance Sheldon—for it is indeed she—takes a step forward, giving a little exclamation of surprise. The little girls look up, see her, and start up in a panic of fear. Martha screams, Deborah drops her sampler, and Charity and Thankful begin to run in the opposite direction, crying. Deborah follows.*)

CHARITY (*shrilly*)

Injuns—Injuns—run for the Stockade!

THANKFUL (*panting*)

Don't stop for your berries—quick!

MARTHA (*takes a step, trips, falls, and cries out in terror*)

Wait—wait for me—o—o—h—o—o—oh!

(*Remembrance stares at the retreating figures in half-dazed amusement. Then she*

goes over to little Martha and helps her up, the child screaming the louder all the time.)

REMEMBRANCE (*kindly, but with a slightly hesitant speech as if she were having to think for each word*)

Do not cry. I will not hurt you. (*Calling to the others*) Deborah—Thankful—Charity—come back!

(*They turn at the sound of their names, take a few steps back, and stand in a little group, holding hands, whispering and incredulous.*)

DEBORAH

I dare not believe my ears.

CHARITY

Nor I.

THANKFUL

'Tis very strange.

REMEMBRANCE (*trying to quiet Martha*)

Please do not cry so. (*To the others*) Have you forgot me?

DEBORAH, CHARITY, *and* THANKFUL (*together*)

Remembrance Sheldon!

(*They go to her round eyed, full of incredulous shyness and awe. She faces them with a free directness in marked contrast.*)

DEBORAH

Is it indeed you, come back from the wilderness?

REMEMBRANCE (*simply*)

Yes, I have come back, but old Rover hath more sense than you. He knew me at once.

THANKFUL

So *that* was why he barked so loud.

REMEMBRANCE (*seeing the sampler dropped near by, stoops and picks it up*)

What might this be, that you all wore such solemn faces over it, and spoke my name so sorrowfully?

DEBORAH (*taking it from her*)

'Tis my new sampler. Have a care how you touch it.

CHARITY (*critically*)

Your hands be none too clean.

REMEMBRANCE (*frowning in a perplexed way*)

A sampler—methinks I have heard that word before.

THANKFUL (*shocked*)

Surely you have not forgot the one you started the same day as mine? (*Remembrance shakes her head.*) 'Twas a beautiful verse you had begun in cross-stitch. (*She recites solemnly*)

The rose is red, the grass is green,
The days are ast that I have seen,
And when the bell begins to toll,
The Lord have mercy on my soul.

REMEMBRANCE (*uneasily*)

I like not the sound of it.

CHARITY

Deborah's was to be a memorial to Eunice Williams and to you, but now I doubt it can be.

DEBORAH (*smoothing out her sampler square in self-defense*)

I care not if she *hath* returned, I shall work it even as I planned.

MARTHA (*drawing closer to Remembrance, and peering at her in fascination*)

Did the savages bring you back? And have you come a long, long way?

REMEMBRANCE

Quingo brought me. He waits over yonder where the tall trees begin.

MARTHA (*scared, and retreating to Deborah and hiding her head under her apron*)

O—h!

THANKFUL (*looking behind her, round eyed*)

Is—is he a savage?

REMEMBRANCE (*pleasantly*)

Quingo is my brother.

CHARITY (*reprovingly*)

Why, Remembrance Sheldon, he is no such thing.

DEBORAH (*explaining*)

You have but two brothers, Jonathan and Ebenezer, and they both live in Deerfield village.

REMEMBRANCE (*carelessly*)

Jonathan and Ebenezer—why, to be sure. But they never carry me on long marches as Quingo does.

CHARITY

I'd be afeared he might scalp me.

REMEMBRANCE (*in surprise*)

Oh, no, no. Quingo is very kind. He gave me his corn and dried bear meat last winter when we were caught in the great snow. He will come now if I give the owl call. Only listen and you will see.

DEBORAH (*hastily, stopping her*)

Do not call him. We want no more Injuns round here.

MARTHA (*putting out her head and repeating solemnly*)

No more Injuns—no.

REMEMBRANCE (*looking from one to another bewildered*)

It is very strange. (*Pointing to her feet*) He made me these moccasins—only see—and showed me how to sew these red and blue beads upon them. And he gave me my name—Little Square-Toes.

CHARITY (*mystified*)

Little Square-Toes—what for?

REMEMBRANCE

Because of my old shoes, before they wore out. (*She points to theirs and laughs.*) Like yours.

CHARITY (*offended*)

I see nothing wrong with my shoes.

REMEMBRANCE

But they are so heavy, and they hide your toes.

CHARITY (*hotly*)

So they were meant to!

DEBORAH (*trying to make peace*)

Hush, Charity, do not chide her. Can you not see she hath lost all modesty living among the savages?

CHARITY (*still annoyed*)

She had best not talk so in Deerfield, else she will be read out in Meeting—(*darkly*) or put in the stocks.

THANKFUL (*going to Remembrance's aid*)

Only see, Remembrance, you are grown inches taller than I. We were just of a height when they carried you away.

DEBORAH (*studying her critically*)

And thinner too, and all over freckles. (*With a headshake*) Dear, dear, whatever will your mother say when she sees them all?

REMEMBRANCE

I would I were not so woefully pale-faced.

THANKFUL

Pale-faced, oh, my, no! But 'twill fade in time.

DEBORAH

I do doubt that your hair has seen a comb this twelvemonth.

CHARITY (*chiming in*)

Mayhap the birds built their nests there and stuck it full of burrs and colored snippets.

THANKFUL (*comfortingly*)

Never mind, Remembrance. If you comb it each day, soon 'twill be as smooth as ours again.

(*She takes off her little cap and exhibits her own smooth head, the hair either short and brushed back severely from her face or else in tight pigtails.*)

REMEMBRANCE (*regarding her in wonder*)

And must I comb mine so *every* day?

THANKFUL

Yes, night and morning, along with your prayers. (*To Deborah*) What say you to our picking out all these threads and feathers before she goes back with us?

DEBORAH

'Tis well said, Thankful. I will help you.

(*They set to work carefully removing the strings and burrs, clustering about the brown figure in their midst, who twists uneasily and winces sometimes when they pull hard.*)

REMEMBRANCE

Spare the red feather, for Quingo gave it me from the bird he shot down three moons ago.

CHARITY (*to the others, with superiority*)

Only listen to her—three moons ago.

DEBORAH (*sadly*)

Who would have thought she could have so forgot our ways in these months? (*To Remembrance*) Do not twist about so, Remembrance. You should be most grateful to us, and not strain away.

CHARITY

Yes, you'd have been the disgrace of the town, returning to your mother in feathers!

REMEMBRANCE

I had thought that she would have welcomed me.

DEBORAH

That she would, though I doubt she would know you for hers in such outlandish trappings.

CHARITY (*to Deborah*)

I wonder does Eunice Williams look so too?

REMEMBRANCE

Eunice?

DEBORAH (*explaining*)

She was also taken a captive in the raid. But you have fared better, for the savages tomahawked her mother and took her father even as far as Quebec.

THANKFUL

He was redeemed and returned to Deerfield three months ago, though poor Eunice still stays with the redskins.

CHARITY

He hath besought the Commissions to ransom her, yet they will not let her go.

REMEMBRANCE (*with pride*)

There was a great reward for me also, Quingo says.

MARTHA (*who has been standing watching all the preparations silently*)

And are you going to stay?

REMEMBRANCE (*thoughtfully*)

I had not thought to come back till I saw the village yesterday from those hills (*she points off-stage*), and then it seemed to me I should like to see my kitten, Tabitha, and sit in the little chair my father made for me, and eat the porridge my mother used to cook. Quingo and the rest were loath to let me go, but I prevailed upon them. They said I had but to call before sunset and they would fetch me away again.

THANKFUL

Your Tabitha has grown to be a great cat now, with kittens of her own.

REMEMBRANCE (*showing almost her first sign of interest*)

Oh, hath she many? And how are they colored?

CHARITY

Ebenezer drowned all but one—a yellow-and-white Tabby like the mother.

REMEMBRANCE (*sighing*)

'Tis a pity they be drowned.

DEBORAH

There, I have the last thread picked out—(*seriously*) I hope you remember your catechism, for the Reverend Williams will be sure to question you upon it. He prays constantly that his Eunice shall not forget hers, even in the wilderness.

REMEMBRANCE (*looking worried*)

Truly, I have forgot it. (*Brightening*) But I can weave as pretty a basket as any squaw, and scrape and sew deerskin for shirts.

DEBORAH (*with another solemn headshake*)

That will not serve you instead of the Catechism.

REMEMBRANCE (*with pride*)

And I am learning to grind corn and dance.

CHARITY (*incredulously*)

You have forgot it all? Every bit? Why, even Martha here is committing it to memory.

MARTHA (*proudly*)

Yes, I can say as far as—What is Sin? (*Begins to rattle it off.*) "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God."

REMEMBRANCE

I like not its sound one whit.

THANKFUL (*to Deborah*)

Think you we could freshen her memory first?

DEBORAH

I doubt there would be time. (*As she begins speaking, a bell clanks solemnly in the distance.*) Listen, there is the sunset bell ringing now.

REMEMBRANCE (*startled*)

What manner of sound is that?

CHARITY

The new meeting-house bell.

THANKFUL (*proudly*)

Yes, they need no longer fire the musket to call folk together.

DEBORAH

It rings morning, noon, and night to bid them go and return from the clearings round about.

REMEMBRANCE

It hath an ugly sound.

CHARITY (*shocked*)

'Twas cast in Boston, and there is no finer in all the colony.

THANKFUL (*to Remembrance*)

I never did hear it without thinking it called out—Come back, Remembrance Sheldon, come back to Deerfield. (*Puts her arm about Remembrance affectionately.*) And now you have indeed come.

REMEMBRANCE (*thoughtfully*)

Mayhap—I think 'twas that I heard last night by our fire in the woods.

DEBORAH (*with an air of responsibility*)

High time that we returned, or they will send a party to search for us. (*To Remem-*

brance) Follow us, and we will take you home.

CHARITY (*to Martha*)

Do not leave your berries by that stump, half spoiled though they be.

(*Martha goes over to get them; the others collect theirs.*)

THANKFUL (*to Deborah*)

I would she need not return so sorry a spectacle.

DEBORAH

Well, there's no help for it.

THANKFUL

I could lend her my apron—'twould cover her fringes.

DEBORAH

Well said, Thankful. She shall have my cap for her head.

CHARITY (*not to be outdone*)

And here is my kerchief till she shall have one of her own.

(*They quickly take off these various articles and cluster round Remembrance, who*

stands, curiously dazed and submissive, before them.)

DEBORAH (*putting the cap on carefully*)

First the cap—so.

CHARITY

Hold still while I fold the linen smooth.

REMEMBRANCE (*protesting*)

But I had rather not. It scratches my neck, and none can see my beads. (*She attempts to pull them out, but Charity stops her.*)

CHARITY (*slipping off several strings of bright beads and throwing them on the ground*)

Devil trappings—'tis there they belong, not about the neck.

REMEMBRANCE (*sorrowfully*)

But they are colored so brightly, and the blue one is made of wampum.

THANKFUL (*soothingly*)

They would never let you wear them in Deerfield. (*Taking off apron*) Here, let me tie my apron upon you.

REMEMBRANCE (*kicking at its hem, which hangs far below her short dress*)

But 'tis too long.

THANKFUL (*encouragingly*)

I warrant that soon you will wear it as well as ever you did.

REMEMBRANCE (*protesting*)

But 'twill trip me when I run.

DEBORAH

Run you must not. Try to walk sedately.

REMEMBRANCE (*faintly*)

It is good to run and leap.

(*She sighs and squirms visibly under these new restraints. The others regard her with satisfaction, pleased by their efforts.*)

DEBORAH

I am right glad we thought to cover her shamelessness. (*Turning to go*) Come, now, let us start back ere the second bell rings. Give me your hand, Martha, and Thankful, do you and Charity show Remembrance the way.

(*They move off together, a quaint little procession, in the direction of Deerfield, from which the bell sounded. Remembrance turns and gives several long back-*

ward looks of regret. No sooner have they left than the long bird call sounds once more from the opposite direction. Just afterward the church bell rings again from the other way. No one is on the stage while this is going on.

A little later Remembrance comes running back. Her cap is already awry, her apron dragging and half off. She is panting and looks fearfully behind her as she listens to the bell.)

VOICES OF THE CHILDREN (*heard calling off-stage*)

Come back, Remembrance Sheldon, come back.

(*She turns uneasily at the sound and hesitates. Then her eyes drop to the ground and she spies her strings of beads. She picks them up, starts to put them over her head, and is bothered by the stiff kerchief. Impatiently she jerks it off and slips on the beads. Then, with more decision, she removes, first the cap and then the apron. With another uneasy look behind her she steals over to one of the trees,* [*or a bush*] *back center. She hangs the things on a low*

branch. Then, giving herself a thorough shake, with a sigh of relief, she turns in the opposite direction from the one the others took. Once more the bird call sounds and this time Remembrance throws back her head and answers it shrilly, eagerly, as she runs off.)

CURTAIN

Miss Ant, Miss Grasshopper, and Mr. Cricket

WITH A SPECIAL BOW TO
MR. ÆSOP

Characters

MISS GRASSHOPPER

MISS ANT

MR. CRICKET

SCENE: *almost any frosty fall night*

Miss Ant, Miss Grasshopper, and Mr. Cricket

SCENE

A QUAINT *little cottage, with bright green door and shutters, curtains at the windows, geraniums on the sills inside, and a shining brass doorknocker. (It is small and stands in the exact center of the stage or out of doors as the case may be. It may be made of heavy beaverboard or even out of screens, and if a thatched roof can be manufactured from straw bottle wrappings, so much the better.)*

Enter Miss Grasshopper, wearing a green dress, made rather like a Pierrette's costume, with short gauze skirts, slippers,

etc. A pair of green or brownish wings are fastened to her shoulders, resembling a Grasshopper's hunched-up ones as closely as possible and she has feelers on her forehead. She should be very slim and dainty, with a delicate, rather wistful face, in contrast to Miss Ant, who is squat and dark.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*to herself*)

Here's the Cottage. How cosy it looks. (*Sniffs.*) And supper must be cooking on the fire. I can smell it. (*She goes nearer, reaches the door, lifts the knocker, but puts it down again fearfully without rapping.*) Oh, dear, I wish I didn't have to ask her. She can be so short sometimes. Still she *couldn't* refuse me shelter for one night. (*Turns to the door again, but once more she cannot bring herself to sound the knocker.*) I wish my teeth didn't chatter so, and my hands weren't so numb. (*She rubs them together, then finally gives a quick rat-a-tat-tat with the knocker.*)

(*The door opens, and Miss Ant stands in the doorway. She is short and dark,*

with immense spectacles, a black dress, and white apron and black mitts. In one hand is some dark knitting. She peers out, frowning.)

MISS ANT (*sharply*)

Well, well, what's wanted? (*Seeing her visitor, and smiling a far from pleasant smile*) Oh, so it's you, Miss Grasshopper. (*Sarcastically*) This is indeed an honor.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*nervously*)

Good—good-evening, Miss Ant. I hope you are enjoying good health.

MISS ANT

Excellent, and no thanks to you.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*stammering*)

No, of course not, I didn't mean—that is, I only asked—with this sudden cold spell we've been having and all——

MISS ANT (*with sly meaning*)

Yes, winter's setting in early this year. There's going to be a big frost to-night.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*continuing timidly*)

That's why I came. I hoped that you might——

MISS ANT (*interrupting her and going on as if she had not heard her last speech*)

But I keep very comfortable—nothing like a fire of your own, a tight roof over your head, and plenty of food in the cupboard.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*plaintively*)

I've eaten nothing for days, and when I smelt your supper cooking just now——

MISS ANT

Nothing like hunger to sharpen the scent. (*Turning*) But I really must go in and see to it.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*begging*)

Please wait, I haven't asked you yet. (*Earnestly*) I came to beg you to take me in for the night. I've no place to go, and you said yourself there was going to be frost.

MISS ANT (*with knowing unpleasantness*)

Oh, so *that's* it, is it? I thought there was some such meaning behind your visit.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

You have plenty and to spare. I thought you wouldn't refuse.

MISS ANT

Then you thought wrong, my fine lady, for not a crumb of mine shall you get, and you can warm yourself by dancing, as you did all summer long.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

My feet are too cold to dance.

MISS ANT

You should have thought of that last summer. Don't say I didn't warn you.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

I couldn't help dancing then, it was so warm and sunny in the grass.

MISS ANT (*scornfully*)

So you thought it would always stay so. You knew so much more than I, and you mocked at me because I delved all day to gather my winter stores.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*hanging her head*)

Pity me now, I beg of you.

MISS ANT

Why should I? You did not offer to help *me* last summer.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

Everyone liked to see me dance then. If I warmed myself by your fire a little I could dance for you again.

MISS ANT

I've had enough of your shiftless, good-for-nothing ways. I shouldn't watch you in any case, I'm too busy with my knitting (*turning back*).

MISS GRASSHOPPER

Only this once.

MISS ANT

Really, I can't waste any more time talking out here in the cold.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

Oh, don't shut your door on me, Miss Ant, please, please, don't.

MISS ANT (*pulling it to*)

Dance away as I bade you, and may Jack Frost be your partner.

(*Miss Ant slams the door rudely. If there is stage equipment enough, lights may show at the windows of the little cottage. Poor Miss Grasshopper stands*

drooping by the door for a minute, evidently hoping Miss Ant will relent and open it.)

MISS GRASSHOPPER

She might have just let me come in and warm myself by her fire. (*As the lights show in windows*) How snug and bright it looks in there. (*Limping away stiffly, rubbing her hands, and then trying to draw her bits of tattered gauze closer*) Oh, dear, I feel like an icicle already, and it isn't even dark. My feet are like lumps of ice, but I must try to dance. Dance, dance, dance.

(*She begins to dance all by herself. The dance may be as elaborate as the one who is playing her can make it; or again, it may be very simple, just a few steps. But it must give the idea that her toes are very numb and her knees stiff with cold, and at the end she falls in a heap on the ground exhausted and miserable.*)

Oh, oh, I can't do it any more. My feet won't take the steps when they're so numb, and I shall certainly freeze before morning. Oh, dear, oh, dear.

(Still on the ground where she dropped, she begins to sob and cry forlornly. Meantime, while she was trying to dance, someone else has entered and stands at one side watching her. This is Mr. Cricket, a dapper little gentleman in brown. He carries a guitar strapped to his back, which helps to give the effect of a cricket's extra legs, and his brown suit fits him tightly.)

MR. CRICKET (*taking off a queer peaked hat and addressing her in a high, chirpy voice*)

Pardon me if I interrupted your dance.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*too miserable to look up*)

You didn't. I couldn't go on with it.

MR. CRICKET (*drawing nearer, peering at her*)

It cannot be possible that my eyes could so deceive me—surely it's my friend, Miss Grasshopper.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*faintly*)

Yes, it's me.

MR. CRICKET (*politely*)

Not quite so gay as the last time we met in August. I trust it is but a slight indisposition.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*shaking her head mournfully*)

Oh, Mr. Cricket, it's worse than that—much worse.

MR. CRICKET

I'm very sorry indeed to hear that. Is there anything I can do?

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*pointing to house*)

Unless you can get her to open her doors to us, I'm afraid not.

MR. CRICKET. (*looking at the house*)

Not Miss Ant? (*He shakes his head emphatically.*) Why, I'd as soon think of asking a pebble to give me honey as to ask her for one grain of wheat.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

You're right. She wouldn't even let me come in by her fire.

MR. CRICKET

She must make sorry company for herself.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*miserably*)

I was good company till the cold came. (*Sadly*) By morning I shall be frozen as stiff as these grasses.

MR. CRICKET

I wouldn't if I were you. It's a pity when you dance so well. (*He stretches out his hand to help her up.*) Come, get up.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

But what is the good of that? Frost will catch us both sooner or later.

MR. CRICKET (*helping her up*)

I'm not so foolish as to let him.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*wonderingly*)

But—but you danced too, you played your guitar all summer. I heard you.

MR. CRICKET

Certainly I did.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

Then how is it? Surely you haven't winter's stores hidden away?

MR. CRICKET (*knowingly*)

I've got better than that, for I can sleep under a palace roof and warm myself at a royal fire and eat crumbs from a king's table.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

It can't be true.

MR. CRICKET

Just come along with me, and you'll see whether it's true or not. (*Nodding to her reassuringly*) Your talents will come in very handy.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*going to him, speaking very earnestly*)

Tell me what you mean. I am so cold and miserable.

MR. CRICKET

Well, you see, all people in the world aren't like Miss Ant. Lots of them like to hear me playing on a cold winter evening. "Listen to the Cricket, how cheerful he sounds." That's what they say. Even the King did once. So why shouldn't you come along with me, and we'll dance and sing together by that big bright fire till it's summer again.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*incredulously*)

Do you really mean it?

MR. CRICKET

I should say I do. (*Giving her his arm gallantly*) But we'll have to be getting along,

or it will grow too dark for me to find my way into the palace.

MISS GRASSHOPPER (*taking his arm*)

I'm so glad you happened by when you did, Mr. Cricket, I didn't want to be frozen.

MR. CRICKET (*as they move off together, arm in arm*)

Just wait till you hear my latest tune. I've been practising it for months.

MISS GRASSHOPPER

And I'll be able to dance to it now. Oh, I'm so glad it isn't (*she shivers a little and looks back at the house*)—the way she said it would be.

MR. CRICKET

I told you Miss Ant didn't know everything.

CURTAIN

Chimney Sweeps' Holiday

A PLAY FOR BOYS

Characters

PAT	*chimney sweeps of Old London.*
TIM	
JOEY	
TERRY	*their master.*
SIR JOSEPH GREENWOOD	*a fine gentleman.*
ANTHONY	*his son, aged seven.*

A crowd of chimney sweeps, hawkers, peddlers, onlookers, and others.

SCENES

I

THE LIBRARY OF GREENWOOD HALL.

II

THE APPRENTICES' ROOM IN TERRY'S ATTIC NEAR LONDON BRIDGE.

III

LONDON BRIDGE ON MAY DAY MORNING.

Time

IN THE SEVENTEEN HUNDREDS, WHEN CHIMNEYS WERE CLEANED BY LITTLE SOOTY-FACED BOYS.

Chimney Sweeps' Holiday

SCENE I

THE *Library of Greenwood Hall. Sir Joseph, a fine gentleman in knee breeches, figured waistcoat, richly colored coat, and a white wig tied behind in a queue, is sitting before a small table by a window or door. He is reading a letter, and before him are papers, ink, and quill pens. This room may be as elaborate or as simple as the stage allows; for instance, if bookcases are possible, that will help, also a fireplace, and green outside the window or*

door, but if it must be played on a bare stage, then it need only have a table, some chairs, and a picture or two, preferably family portraits.)

SIR JOSEPH (*reading aloud*)

"In accordance with your esteemed instructions, we beg to inform you that there is no further news to report of your missing son, Joseph William Mortimer Greenwood, who disappeared from Greenwood Hall, Sussex, two years ago, the ninth of May in the seventh year of his age."

(*Sir Joseph stops, sighs, either looks up at the portrait of a little boy hanging above him, or, if it is impossible to have a portrait, he may pick up a miniature from his table, which he studies with a sorrowful expression and headshake. Then he returns to the letter, reading on:*)

"We have posted notices of the reward and spare no pains in our efforts to trace his whereabouts if he be in the city of London."

(*Sir Joseph sighs again, folds the letter, and lays it down. Presently from outside*

the window comes a sound of voices singing gayly an old folk song.)

VOICES OUTSIDE (*singing*)

"Come, lasses and lads, get leave of your dads,
And away to the Maypole hie,
For ev'ry he has got him a she,
With the fiddler standing by. . . ."*

(*Sir Joseph goes to the window and closes it. Just after he has done so the door opens, and a little boy enters, a very richly dressed boy of seven or so, also in knee breeches, coat, waistcoat, and queue. He runs in, all eagerness, holding a willow whistle in one hand.*)

ANTHONY

Father, listen, the Mayers are going by!

SIR JOSEPH

Yes, Anthony, I heard them.

ANTHONY

They look so gay in their ribbons and flowers, and the fiddle is gayest of all. Don't you like to hear them?

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*For the music for these words see "Folk-Songs and Other Songs for Children." Edited by Jane Byrd Radcliffe-Whitehead. Oliver Ditson Company.

SIR JOSEPH

Not to-night.

ANTHONY

Why not?

SIR JOSEPH

Because that means it is May Eve again, and another year gone with no news of your brother.

ANTHONY

How long since he went away?

SIR JOSEPH (*sighing again*)

Two years this May that he was stolen—'tis no wonder I hate the month above all others.

ANTHONY (*shocked*)

Not the month of May, Father, with the leaves and grass so green, and our thorn tree all in white. Look. (*He pulls Sir Joseph to the window, pointing*) I can see it from my bed. The moon is shining on it when I go to sleep and the sun when I wake up.

SIR JOSEPH

Your brother loved it, too. He made a wish upon it every May Eve.

ANTHONY

Then I shall too. I'll walk round it three times playing on my pipe and wishing for him to come back.

SIR JOSEPH (*drawing him close*)

Pray heaven it may come true.

ANTHONY (*holding up his pipe*)

See my pipe? Dick the gardener made it for me, out of a willow shoot.

SIR JOSEPH

Dick's a great hand with willow shoots.

ANTHONY (*putting it to his lips*)

He showed me how to play it, too. I can play that tune the Mayers sang. (*He plays a bar or two, then stops.*) But I forgot, you don't like to hear that one.

SIR JOSEPH

Play me another instead.

ANTHONY

That's the only one Dick taught me—but I'll hear plenty of new ones to-morrow on the Green.

SIR JOSEPH (*absently*)

On the Green?

ANTHONY

Why, yes, when they dance round the maypole. (*Anxiously*) You said I could go this year.

SIR JOSEPH

And so you may. Tell Dick he may leave the garden and take you.

ANTHONY

Aren't you coming too, Father?

SIR JOSEPH

No, I must away to London.

ANTHONY

To London? On May Day?

SIR JOSEPH

Yes, Anthony, 'twill not be so green and sweet smelling, but I must go there.

ANTHONY

Why not the day after to-morrow?

SIR JOSEPH (*drawing the boy toward him as he sits in his chair*)

There will be dancing in London too, though not like any you ever saw. Little boys with black faces will bob up and down on the

cobblestones because it is Chimney Sweeps' Holiday.

ANTHONY

Chimney Sweeps' Holiday. (*Wonderingly*) But what makes you go to London to see them?

SIR JOSEPH (*with another sigh*)

Because I am always hoping to find some trace of your brother. (*He picks up miniature.*)

ANTHONY

I heard Dick say he never did like the looks of that master sweep who was here with his boys the day my brother disappeared. Do you think he took him away, Father?

SIR JOSEPH

Who knows? Joseph was last seen in the village with such a fellow, so I must go to London and peer at all the sooty little sweeps in their rags and tatters.

ANTHONY (*with sudden resolution*)

I will go with you.

SIR JOSEPH

What? And miss the dancers on the Green and the maypole?

ANTHONY (*hesitating*)

But how can I see them and the chimney sweeps too?

SIR JOSEPH

You would not know your brother if you should meet him face to face, for you were too little when he was spirited away.

ANTHONY (*studying the miniature in his father's hand or else the portrait.*)

I have looked upon his picture so often. (*Earnestly*) Let me go to London with you, Father, and search for him.

SIR JOSEPH

I would not have you see those poor boys. You are too young yet for such sights.

ANTHONY

My brother was seven, too, when he went—just my age.

SIR JOSEPH (*turning away bitterly*)

Do not put me in mind of it.

ANTHONY (*holding out the pipe*)

And I will take my pipe along and play the Mayers' tune upon it. Perhaps he will hear it and remember.

SIR JOSEPH (*with sudden interest*)

'Tis worth the trying, Anthony, and you shall go along with me to look for your lost brother.

ANTHONY (*joyfully*)

In my new coat with the silver buttons?

SIR JOSEPH (*smiling indulgently for the first time*)

In the new coat, to be sure. But go now, bid your mother good-night, and tell her I will come to her presently. (*He returns to his pen and papers.*)

ANTHONY

First I must go out and wish on the May tree, Father. It would never do to forget that.

(*He goes off, skipping gayly, and either piping or singing, "Come, lasses and lads."*)

SIR JOSEPH (*staring out sadly, and speaking low and to himself*)

Oh, my dear son Joseph, where are you on this sweet May Eve?

CURTAIN

SCENE II

THE APPRENTICES' *room, high up in an old house near London Bridge. Here again this can be played on practically an empty stage, because all that is needed will be bags heaped about. These are supposed to be full of the soot which has been collected from chimney sweeping and which is waiting to be sold. Until then the bags are the boys' beds, tables, and chairs. A window in the back is in the same position as in Scene I. The smallest of the three boys stands with his back to the audience, on tiptoe, peering out of it. His two companions are seated on the bags and floor in the center of the stage when the curtain rises.*

PAT (*the biggest of the three*)

Peer through the keyhole, Tim, and see if Terry's gone.

TIM (*going to the keyhole and crouching at it for a minute*)

Aye, he's gone, and the old woman too. And they ain't left so much as a live coal in the grate.

PAT (*knowingly*)

Then they're off till midnight, like enough. Get the things out and we'll begin. (*Addressing the boy at the window*) And you over there, stop moonin' and stir yourself if you want stars on your mantle.

JOEY (*still looking out, and speaking with a less shrill, more refined voice*)

I wasn't mooning. I was wishing.

PAT (*jeeringly*)

Wishing, is it? Whoever heard the like o' that now?

JOEY (*timidly*)

Did you never hear of wishing on May Eve? They say 'tis sure to come true.

PAT (*laughing*)

Ho-ho, listen to him, Tim!

TIM (*coming out from behind a bag with some tin foil and a pair of scissors*)

Oh, leave him be, Pat, where's the harm in it? I'm sure I could wish to-morrow would never come to an end.

PAT (*crossly*)

Well, stop your wishing the pair of you and

help me with these stars. We'll get no coppers if we've got none on us, plague take the things. (*He throws down three ragged dark pieces of cloth worn over the heads by chimney sweeps of that time. Tim begins to cut out a star from the tin foil, but Joey continues to look out of the window. Pat becomes very cross.*) Lay off your starin' an' come over here, young 'un, or there'll be more skin off you than there is a'ready.

JOEY (*hanging farther out*)

There's a barge down there on the river, full of green branches. The men on it are singing. I wish I could hear the tune.

PAT (*kicking him on the shins*)

I'll teach you another kind of tune if you don't leave off your staring!

JOEY (*turning reluctantly and limping toward the others*)

I'm coming, Pat, and be careful how you kick me, that chimney flue Master made me clean this morning was the smallest I ever crawled up. My knees and elbows are all raw again.

TIM

Mighty stingy the cook was, too, not even givin' you a slice o' bread an' drippin' for the trouble. But Master got an extra shillin'. I seen him pocket it.

PAT

He's drunk it down in beer a'ready. 'Tis why he were so ugly to us just now. (*Giving one of the cloths to Joey and a needle and thread*) Here, now, young 'un, see you sew 'em on to stay, an' mind how you do it. We haven't none to spare.

TIM

I should say not. A penny's worth of silver paper makes a dreadful poor show.

JOEY

'Twere my penny—the one Master didn't see cook give me in the big house in Hyde Park where the bricks were so hot they burned my hands.

PAT

Now, now, never you mind whose penny it was. I had trouble enough sneaking these

scissors and the thread and needle out from under the old woman's nose.

JOEY (*pausing in his work*)

My fingers are so blistered I can't pull the thread through the cloth.

PAT (*cuffing him*)

None o' that, now, or I tells Master who knocked his pipe off the shelf, an' then he'll beat you to an inch o' your blessed life.

JOEY (*scared*)

No, no, Pat, you wouldn't do that. I'll try to sew faster, I will indeed.

PAT (*a little mollified*)

Well, you'd better, if you want to be let out to-morrow.

TIM (*anxiously*)

We'd all best keep still and work fast, 'twould go hard with us if they come sneaking in and caught us fixing up for the holiday.

PAT

Aye, that's true enough. He'd beat us till we couldn't hardly stand, let alone dance with the rest on London Bridge.

JOEY (*curiously*)

What's it like, Pat—Chimney Sweeps' Holiday? I wasn't let out last year.

PAT (*thoughtfully*)

Somethin' queer about that, too. I allus said as how he and the old woman knew more'n they'd let on, the way they kept you shut up here.

TIM

Well, it's our holiday, and some masters they give their sweeps a bath and a new shirt maybe, but catch our old man a-doin' of that.

PAT

Yes, catch him. He'd keep us cleanin' chimneys, if he dared, he would.

JOEY

And do all the sweeps wear stars on their mantles and dance on London Bridge?

TIM

Aye, an' some sings, too, an' last May Day I got a bun with currants and sixpence—in halfpennies.

PAT

They allus gives the most to little chaps, you'll not be getting that much this year.

TIM

Never you mind what I'll be getting. You won't see none of it.

PAT (*threatening*)

Oh, I won't, won't I? You look a' here, now, we shares our winnin's we does, an' you'll be sorry if you forgets it. D'you hear me, the pair o' you?

TIM *and* JOEY (*scared*)

Ye—es, we hears you.

PAT

You'd better.

JOEY (*after a pause*)

I can't see to sew the stars here. Let me take it to the window.

PAT

Well, mind you work fast, and don't go moonin' again.

(*Joey goes to the window; he finishes his work.*)

TIM

How about polishing our faces off a bit, Pat? You know they're more likely to give pennies if they can see you've got a face under the soot.

PAT

I knows, but there's no more'n a cupful in the water pail.

TIM

We could get some off with a corner of these here covers. (*He holds out the mantles.*)

PAT

Come on, then, you can do me first. Mind you go easy now.

(*Tim begins wiping Pat's face off with the mantle. It is hard work, for the soot sticks fast. Pat twists and makes wry faces.*)

PAT

Hi, there, what you tryin' to do, take off me nose?

TIM

I'm a-doin' of my best, but it's on to stay.

JOEY (*hopefully*)

And what about my face?

PAT

Your face? Who's goin' to bother with that?

JOEY (*wistfully*)

But I'm blackest of all, going up the smallest chimney flues.

TIM

I comes next, 'cause I'm the next oldest.

JOEY (*laying down his work*)

The stars are all on now—there was only five left for mine. (*After a pause*) Listen, the bargemen are close by now. I wonder if the Mayers are singing to-night.

TIM

Mayers? What's they?

JOEY (*surprised*)

Why, the Mayers, they go about singing and bringing green boughs. I always used to hear them.

PAT (*irritated*)

I'm sick of your airs an' graces. Allus actin' the fine gentleman, you are.

JOEY (*half puzzled and half dazed*)

No, Pat, I wasn't. I was only remembering —but it hurts me in the head to remember.

PAT

It'll hurt you more if Master catches you at it.

TIM

Let's put on the cloths and see how they look.

(The three hurriedly don the mantles. They have holes in the middle and slip over their heads. The stars show crudely strewn over the ragged, sooty folds.)

TIM

My, they're grand. Folks ought to give us lots o' pennies for these.

JOEY

I'd rather my face and hands were clean of the soot.

PAT

Now, now, none o' your whinin'.

TIM *(capering about clumsily)*

Here's how we'll dance. *(Taking Joey's hand he shows him.)* We'll join hands with other sweeps on the bridge, and first we waves our brushes and calls, same's we do of a

morning, *'WEEP-'WEEP.* An' then we dances about—so.

JOEY (*after he stops*)

Is *that* dancing?

PAT

Well, let's see you do any better.

JOEY (*thoughtfully*)

There was one I used to know—Dick taught me. (*Rubbing his forehead*) Dick—that's queer.

TIM (*curiously*)

Who's Dick?

JOEY

Dick is—Dick is—— (*He stares about dazedly.*) Why, I don't know—but it went like this—see. (*He goes through steps of an old country dance.*) And they sang, too. (*He begins to sing, uncertainly at first, then with more confidence as the tune and words come back to him.*)

"Come, lasses and lads, get leave of your dads
And away to the Maypole hie,
For every he has got him a she,
With the fiddler standing by."

(*The other two boys watch him, fascinated.*)

PAT

You'd ought to go faster.

JOEY (*pausing a second*)

I could if 'twasn't for my knees. They're that sore I can't bend them.

TIM (*eagerly*)

Go on. Go on.

JOEY (*dancing and continuing the song*)

"For Willy has gotten his Jill,
And Johnny has got his Joan,
To jig, jig it, jig it, jig it,
Jig it up and down."

(*The other two watch, admiring in spite of themselves. They are so absorbed that they do not notice the door has opened and Old Terry stands in it, peering and frowning at the sight before him. He is in ragged clothes, carries a bag over one shoulder and a thick stick in the other hand.*)

JOEY (*getting more and more into the spirit of the song and dance*)

"Strike up," says Watt. "Agreed," says Kate,
"I prithee, Fiddler, play."
"Content," says Hodge, and so says Madge,
For this is a holiday."

OLD TERRY (*striding into the room, brandishing his club*)

Not yet it ain't, not yet!

(*The boys cower before him, and Joey backs away, terrified, with one arm thrown up over his face to ward off blows.*)

JOEY

Oh, please, Master, I didn't mean any harm.

OLD TERRY

Oh, you didn't! (*Advancing still more threateningly*) I'll teach you to sing and dance the minute my back's turned. (*Catching hold of the mantle*) And what's this 'ere? Silver stars —that you come by in no honest way or I misses my guess. (*He jerks the mantle off and*

tears it up before the boys' eyes.) There, now, that'll teach you. But that ain't all I'm goin' to teach you before the night's over. (*He raises the stick and goes toward him, but Joey is quick and slips out of his grasp. There is a scuffle, while Old Terry chases him about the room. Pat and Tim stand by, close together, not daring to help Joey.*)

JOEY (*as he is caught, struggling*)

Don't beat me, Master, please don't beat me on May Eve.

OLD TERRY (*furious*)

Don't you May Eve me, you good for nothing little Blackface. (*He laughs loudly and holds him off at arms' length.*) Why, your own father wouldn't know you if he was to see you now, 'e wouldn't. An' you won't know yourself when I gets through with you.

(*He raises the stick to begin the beating; the two other boys crouch in a corner, hastily pulling off their mantles and staring round eyed as the curtain falls.*)

SCENE III

LONDON BRIDGE *at noon of the next day. Here again there need be practically no scenery, just a bare stage, with a suggestion of a stone wall at back, if this can be managed. Sir Joseph and Anthony are standing together a little at one side, watching a group of boy chimney sweeps who come on singing and hopping about to a queer, stiff-legged jig of their own. There can be as many boys as there are players, and they may be used over and over again during the scene to make it seem as if there were many more groups. They are all more or less sooty of face, with the ragged dark mantles over their heads. Some have stars, and others have not. Some carry their brushes on long sticks, which they wave grotesquely as they pass.*

ANTHONY (*pointing*)

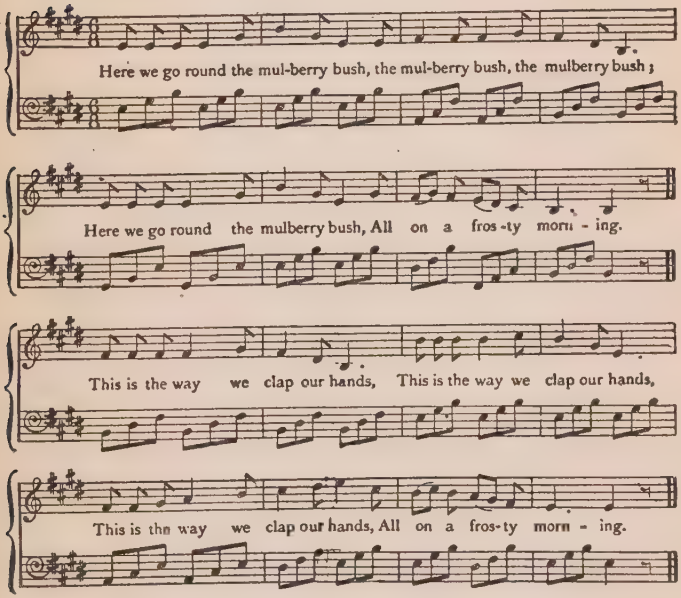
Here come more of them, Father. Let me have another penny to throw.

SIR JOSEPH (*handing him one*)

Well, here's my last. Take care to wait till they are close to us.

THE SWEEPS (*singing in a sort of monotonous chant, to the tune of the old nursery rhyme, "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush."*)

"'Ere we comes, poor Sweepers all, Sweepers all,
Sweepers all,
'Ere we comes, poor Sweepers all, with a 'Weep,
'weep, 'weep in the morning."



(*They go through a rude sort of clogging dance, holding out their sooty hands for pennies.*)

ONE SWEEP (*to Anthony*)

Give us a penny, little master.

ANOTHER SWEEP (*pushing him aside*)

Aye, remember the poor sweeps on May Day.

(*Anthony throws out a copper, and the boys break their formation to scramble for it.*)

BOYS (*squabbling among themselves*)

'Tis mine!

'Tis not. I caught it fair.

You never.

I'd my hands on it when you pushed me away.

Take that for it, you little sneak.

(*Fists begin to fly.*)

A SMALLER SWEEP (*drawing closer*)

I didn't get none, little mister. They allus pushes me away, the big uns do.

ANTHONY (*sympathetically*)

That's too bad.

SMALL SWEEP (*confidentially*)

They ain't none of 'em got the sore knees

I 'ave. (*He exhibits them, bare and raw.*) See there an' there.

ANTHONY (*horrified*)

Oh, Father, do you see?—his knees.

SMALL SWEEP (*making the most of his stock*)

Sometimes they's worse'n this, when the chimney flue's only so big. (*He shows with his two hands how small.*)

SIR JOSEPH

How old are you, boy?

SMALL SWEEP

Master said once as I were seven, but I ain't sure. I been climbing chimneys since I can remember.

ANTHONY

I'm seven too. (*To his father*) He's lots littler than I.

SMALL SWEEP

You 'as to be to get up the smallest flues.

SIR JOSEPH (*looking down at him sadly*)

Who knows if my Joseph—— (*Taking a coin from his pocket*) Here, boy, here's something for you. 'Tis the last I have.

SMALL SWEEP

A threepenny bit. Oh, thank yer kindly, sir. I'll make off afore they takes it from me.

(He hobbles away spryly, and the other boys, having finished their quarreling, get up and go off. Their song sounds off-stage as they go.)

SIR JOSEPH

Who could think there were so many poor sweeps in all of London as we have seen here in a morning!

ANTHONY

And they're so black, Father. Do you think, even if my brother passed by, that you could tell him?

SIR JOSEPH

God knows. *(Taking Anthony's hand in his)* Well, we can but try, my son.

ANTHONY

Yes, Father, and I haven't played on my willow pipe yet. I've got it here, safe in my pocket.

SIR JOSEPH (*with a tired headshake*)

A willow pipe would scarcely be heard in London, I fear.

ANTHONY

Well, I may as well try, since I've carried it all the way.

(*Sound of singing off-stage.*)

More are coming, ever so many more now, Father.

(*Crowd of boys enter, singing as before.*)

THE SWEEPS

"'Ere we comes, poor Sweepers all, Sweepers all, Sweepers all,
'Ere we comes, poor Sweepers all with a 'Weep, 'weep, 'weep in the morning."

SIR JOSEPH (*to himself as he sees them approaching*)

My heart fails me each time I hear them coming, and always it is the same story; sooty faces and red knees and little skinny hands, and never one that is like him, never a one.

ANTHONY (*peering off*)

These have got more stars on their mantles, and one has green wound round his brushes. I wish we hadn't given away all our money.

(*In the group of boys that now enter, Pat, Tim, and Joey may easily be recognized among the rest. Pat and Tim have on their mantles, but Joey has only his ragged little jerkin and trousers reaching to his knees. His legs and feet are bare, and he is still very sooty. Although he is quite close to Sir Joseph and Anthony, no sign of remembrance shows on his face, and they do not notice him out of the group.*)

PAT

Got a penny for us poor sweeps, sir?

(*Sir Joseph shakes his head.*)

TIM

May Day's Chimney Sweeps' Holiday. Don't forget those as cleans out your chimneys.

ANTHONY (*explaining politely*)

I'm sorry. We've given all our pennies away already.

PAT (*grumbling crossly*)

That's what they all says, whether their pockets are stuffed full or no.

TIM (*to Joey*)

Maybe if you was to do your dance for 'em they'd find some.

JOEY

I can't do it, Tim, I can't bend my knees.

PAT (*threateningly*)

Who cares if you bend 'em or not? You do your jig, young 'un, an' don't waste no more breath.

ANTHONY

Oh, please, don't make him. His knees do look bad.

PAT

That's nothin'——

JOEY (*apologetically*)

I'd do it gladly, if Master hadn't beat me so hard last night I can hardly stand.

ONE OF THE OLDER BOYS

'E's lyin', the little rascal. (*Grabs him by the collar and shoves him forward.*)

SIR JOSEPH (*stepping between the boys*)

No one shall make you dance.

(*He has taken Joey by the shoulder to separate him from the rest. He looks down and discovers his hand is black with soot. He takes out his handkerchief and fastidiously wipes it off.*)

PAT (*jeering*)

For shame to dirty the fine gentleman's fingers—for shame.

JOEY (*hanging his head*)

I'm sorry, sir. Some masters give their sweeps a bath for the holiday, but ours, he wouldn't.

SIR JOSEPH (*kindly*)

It's no matter, boy. (*With half-hearted interest*) What is your name?

PAT (*jeeringly*)

He's called Joey, same's the clowns.

ANOTHER SWEEP

An' he's clumsy same's they are, too!

ANTHONY (*going to Joey*)

My name's Anthony, but they call me Tony

sometimes. Maybe you've got a long one besides.

JOEY (*low*)

Maybe I have, but nobody calls me anything but Joey now!

SIR JOSEPH (*who has turned away, not hearing this last remark*)

Come, Anthony, we'll go back another way.

ANTHONY (*lingering*)

I'm sorry I haven't any more pennies (*Looking down at the pipe in his hands*), but here's my pipe. You can have it. (*He puts it in the other boy's hand. Joey regards it wonderingly.*) Dick will make me another as soon as I get home.

ONE OF THE OTHER SWEEPS

A pipe, ho-ho, much good that'll do you. (*He starts to snatch it, but Joey clutches it firmly.*)

JOEY

Don't touch it. He gave it to me.

PAT

I'd like to see you play on it.

JOEY (*with sudden resolve*)

And so you shall.

(*He puts it to his lips. At first he handles it awkwardly, feeling for the holes; then, as his fingers grow used to the feeling and he gains confidence, he begins to play, hesitantly at first, but unmistakably, the Mayers' tune of the first scene.*)

ANTHONY (*running to his father, who has gone on a pace or two, tugging at his sleeve*)

Father, listen! Do you hear? He's playing our Mayers' tune.

(*As they turn back, Joey becoming more and more full of the Maying spirit, begins to take a few steps of the country dance which Anthony did in the first scene. He is very stiff and can hardly bend his knees, but the steps are the same, and he continues to play, with more and more sureness every minute.*)

TIM (*to Pat*)

I say, Pat, did you ever see the like of him?

PAT

He might have told us he could play a pipe. Wait till I get him back at Old Terry's.

SIR JOSEPH (*coming to the dancing boy*)

There, there, that's enough. (*Bending down*) Put down the pipe and tell me who taught you to play it.

JOEY (*pausing abashed and dazed in their midst*)

Dick taught me, sir.

SIR JOSEPH (*incredulous*)

Dick, your master?

JOEY

No, no, long ago—where it was green, and I never had to climb dark chimneys

ANTHONY (*unable to contain himself*)

Is he my brother, Father? Is he indeed my brother?

SWEEPS (*all laughing together*)

His brother—ho-ho, that's a good 'un, that is!

(*They go off jeering.*)

JOEY (*rubbing his forehead*)

If I could just get the soot out of my nose and eyes and ears—maybe I could remember. There was a Dick, and it was green, and then came Master and the bags of soot,

and I've climbed such a lot of chimneys since. (*He acts out a queer pantomime, holding his arms above his head and pretending to climb up slowly.*) The bricks, they do get so hot. (*He trembles all over as he remembers.*) They burn you sometimes, but you have to go on up till your brush shows out of the top, or Master beats you. (*He crumples up in a heap on the ground, worn out with his exertions and last night's beating.*)

SIR JOSEPH (*bending down and picking him up*) Joseph, my little son. (*He wipes the boy's face tenderly with his handkerchief, while Anthony hovers near by.*) Your face under the soot. To think I could pass you by like that. I, who have searched London streets for you month after month.

ANTHONY

Look, Father, he's opening his eyes.

SIR JOSEPH

Thank God, they are still blue. (*Gathering him up in his arms to carry him away*) Come, Anthony, follow me. I shall carry him to where we left our coach.

ANTHONY (*puzzled*)

It's queer he didn't know us, Father, and yet he could play the Mayers' tune.

SIR JOSEPH

Not so strange, poor boy. (*He carries him off, Anthony following.*)

ANTHONY (*as they go*)

He's still holding Dick's pipe. Aren't you glad I brought it to London, Father?

THE CURTAIN FALLS BEFORE WE HEAR THE ANSWER

The Sentimental Scarecrow

Characters

THE SCARECROW

THE BLOND SISTER

THE BRUNETTE SISTER

THE GIPSY GIRL

GIPSY WOMAN

GIPSY FIDDLER

GIPSY BOY

POLLY

TIME: *any time and any place*

The Sentimental Scarecrow

AN OPEN FIELD (*preferably one with bunched cornstalks in it, though this is not necessary, and the field may be a real or a stage one*). *The Scarecrow is standing in this, and a road runs alongside, taking up about half the stage space. Upon this the people walk, with a low ledge or some suggestion of a fence between.*

The Scarecrow himself stands very stiff and straight, in tattered garments—old high hat, red waistcoat, dilapidated patched coat, and ragged trousers.

Just after the curtain rises a clock strikes three strokes distantly.

THE SCARECROW (*counting them aloud*)

Ten—eleven—twelve. Half the day gone, and I had such high hopes when it began. (*He shakes his head and sighs deeply.*) It won't be Fair Day again for a whole year, and that's the only time there's much doing on this back road. I don't see how I'm going to better myself if no one will speak to me, and how I'm to hope for a wife and a home of my own . . .

(*He takes an enormous bandana handkerchief from his pocket, blows his nose, and wipes his eyes pathetically before he goes on.*)

Bad enough if I were just an ordinary scarecrow with no sentiments, but here I am with a heart under Farmer Jones's waistcoat (*he pulls it down*), and brains under Doctor Sawyer's beaver hat (*he lifts it*), not to speak of that tidy little fortune hidden away in Old Man Mullins's greatcoat. (*He pats an inner pocket knowingly.*) If only there wasn't this prejudice against scarecrows. (*He sighs again, then brightens as he peers*

down the road.) Two ladies, as true as can be, two beautiful and elegant ladies coming this way. Who knows but one of these——

> (*He breaks off to adjust his hat and handkerchief, pull down his coat, and assume the most gallant attitude possible under the circumstances.*
> *Two pretty ladies now enter, wearing any sort of fancy dress, so long as it is not modern. One should be blonde and the other brunette.*)

BRUNETTE

We must be nearly at the Fair Grounds now, Sister.

BLONDE

It's surely the longest mile I ever traveled, and such dust!

BRUNETTE

Ill luck has followed us from the moment we left our gate, and then to lose the wheel of our coach and have to arrive on our two feet.

BLONDE (*looking down at her shoes*)

And mighty dusty ones, too! (*Seats herself*

on the roadside.) I can go no farther till I am rid of this pebble.

SCARECROW (*who has been anxiously awaiting his chance*)

Sweet ladies, good day to you. (*He bows politely from his place.*) Your ill luck has been my good fortune, since it brings you here.

BLONDE (*starting up*)

Mercy, Sister, what croaking can that be? It came from behind you.

BRUNETTE

A talking scarecrow. (*Laughing*) Well, well, what will befall us next?

SCARECROW (*earnestly*)

I assure you I would not have ventured to intrude had I not heard you speak of an accident to your coach.

BRUNETTE (*coolly*)

And what is that to you, pray?

SCARECROW

Nothing, save that I might make so bold as to offer my humble services.

BLONDE (*low to the other*)

Sister, did you hear him? Did you hear what he said?

BRUNETTE (*low*)

Much better take no notice. Hurry and fasten your shoe.

BLONDE

Then help me clasp this buckle.

(*They both bend over it*)

SCARECROW (*desperately*)

I know that my appearance is rather—shall we say extraordinary? But I am sure you would be the last to let this stand in the way of true worth and—and affection.

BRUNETTE

Sister, really you *must* get your shoe on. He's becoming familiar!

BLONDE (*tugging at her shoe*)

I'm trying, but my foot is blistered so. Have you tried fixing him with a cold stare?

BRUNETTE

I've tried a cold stare and a withering glance, but neither one does any good.

SCARECROW

If only it were possible for me to come closer——

BRUNETTE (*haughtily*)

Advance one step and you will regret it.

SCARECROW

Oh, I would gladly take all consequences, but I may not stir from this spot unless—— (*Very earnestly*) Sweet ladies, all my future happiness lies in your hands.

BRUNETTE (*crisply*)

My hands are quite full enough already.

BLONDE

And mine. (*She rises from buckling her shoe.*)

SCARECROW

One word of love, and the spell which binds me would be broken.

BRUNETTE

He has the effrontery to speak of love!

BLONDE

And we haven't even been introduced properly. Come, Sister, let us go at once.

SCARECROW (*making a last desperate effort*)

And it's not as if I came to you empty

handed. I can provide for a wife. I have a fortune of my own.

BRUNETTE (*laughing contemptuously*)

A fortune of his own.

SCARECROW

What a pretty laugh you have, lady, and your eyes are so bright and dark, and you carry yourself so proudly, I should never tire of watching you move about a house.

BRUNETTE (*furious*)

Really, the fellow must be mad. (*She moves off, picking up her skirts.*)

SCARECROW (*to Blonde*)

And you are just as pretty. In fact, I am almost inclined to think yellow hair is more beautiful. There's a great deal to be said for blue eyes too. Then, when your shoe was off just now, I noticed your foot and——

BLONDE (*cutting him short*)

Such impertinence!

(*Joining her sister, the two move off.*)

SCARECROW

If you would only hear me out.

BLONDE

Something really should be done to rid the roads of such nuisances.

BRUNETTE

I mean to report it to the authorities.

(*They leave haughtily, shaking the dust of the place from their skirts as they go.*)

SCARECROW (*mopping his forehead*)

Disheartening, that's what it is. With two of them it did seem as if there might be a chance. Well, I'd better whistle to keep my spirits up.

(*He starts whistling a lively tune, though it is plain to be seen that he is still sad. Presently music sounds off-stage, a fiddle and tambourines. He stops whistling to listen.*)

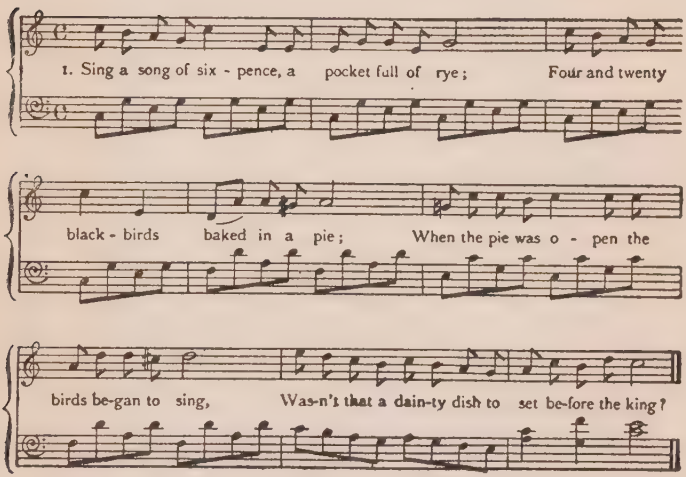
A fiddle, if my ears don't deceive me. (*Peering off*) I'd say it was gipsies, by all the red and yellow handkerchiefs. (*He nods his head as the music comes nearer.*)

Gipsies it is. Hurrah! (*He cheers up visibly.*)

(*A small band of gipsies enter, as many as there are extra actors; four, however,*

have speaking parts: a gipsy woman with a baby strapped on her back; a gipsy boy with a fiddle; another boy with a guitar, and a very pretty young gipsy girl.)

GIPSIES (*singing to the tune of "Sing a Song of Sixpence"*)



"Sing a song of Fair Days,
Ribbons bright and new,
Bring your silver, Lad and Lass,
And hear a fortune true.

"Buy a woven basket
To fetch your treasures home,—
But never cross a gipsy
Wherever you may roam."

SCARECROW (*clapping his hands*)
Well, well, that's what I like to hear. How about another tune?

FIDDLER (*with a grimace*)
You must think we've got nothing to do, wasting time and tunes on a Scarecrow.

GIPSY WOMAN (*grumbling*)
But for losing our way we'd have been at the Fair hours ago, now the best half of the day is gone and all the money spent.

GIPSY BOY
Stop talking and come along, then, if you want any supper to-night.

(*He pulls at the Gipsy Girl's arm. She jerks away and in so doing her string of red beads breaks, and the beads scatter in the road.*)

GIPSY GIRL (*crossly*)
There now, see what you've done.

GIPSY BOY (*carelessly*)

You shouldn't have pulled away. (*He does not help her and moves on with the rest, while she lingers to pick the beads up.*)

GIPSY GIRL

I think you might help me find them.

GIPSY BOY (*laughingly over his shoulder*)

Me? No, indeed, I've got too much business on hand, but your fine friend here (*pointing to the Scarecrow*), I'm sure he'll be glad to oblige you. (*As he goes he calls back over his shoulder*) And I advise you not to lose a bead and to meet us by the striped tent if you don't want another beating from Old Beppo. (*He goes off.*)

SCARECROW

He spoke in fun, my dear, but you little know how gladly I would help you if I could.

GIPSY GIRL (*hunting about in the dust*)

Don't mind what he said. I'll beat them all to the Fair.

SCARECROW

Yes, you've a light foot. I can see that.

GIPSY GIRL

I can dance the tarantella—see. (*She straightens up, lifts her tambourine and takes a few steps and several attitudes.*)

SCARECROW (*enchanted*)

Delightful! That must bring the silver in fast.

GIPSY GIRL (*shrugging*)

Silver, coppers—it's all the same to me. I never see any of it. (*She gets on her knees again and hunts beads.*)

SCARECROW (*shocked*)

You mean—they take it away from you?

GIPSY GIRL

To be sure. I'm lucky if I get a new shawl once in two years.

SCARECROW (*eagerly*)

Listen to me, Gipsy Girl, you needn't live such a life.

GIPSY GIRL (*lightly*)

Oh, it's not so bad.

SCARECROW

But don't you get tired of it—the fairs, I

mean, and bad weather and never knowing where your next meal is coming from?

GIPSY GIRL (*wonderingly*)

Why, I don't know. I never think about it.

SCARECROW

They must have told you that you're very pretty?

GIPSY GIRL

If I had a yellow dress now, I could make them sit up and take notice. (*She looks ruefully down at her patched brown one.*)

SCARECROW

Yes, that would become you. (*Beckoning*) Come closer and let me look at you.

GIPSY GIRL (*goes a step or two nearer*)

Well, what do you think of me? Take a good look, for I must be off this minute.

SCARECROW

Your eyes are just as big as I thought, and your hair's black and sleek as a crow's wing. (*Sighs.*) And I ought to know all about crows.

GIPSY GIRL

You've had a plenty long enough look. (*Turns to go.*)

SCARECROW

No, no, please listen, I'm just coming to the most important part. You mustn't mind if I don't lead up to it as I should if time wasn't so pressing——

GIPSY GIRL (*backing away a little nervously*)

You're the queerest acting Scarecrow I ever came across in all our junketings.

SCARECROW (*earnestly*)

I know. I'm not like the rest. I've got affection and no way to use it way off here in this cornfield. If only someone came along to care for me, then I'd be able to marry and settle down. That's why I'm offering you my hand.

GIPSY GIRL (*laughing*)

Why, whoever heard of such a thing? It's a rare joke.

SCARECROW (*hurt*)

It's not a joke. Maybe I'm not so much when it comes to looks, but you won't be

either if you keep on being out in all weathers. Yes, it's time you had a home of your own with a kitchen full of shiny pots and pans.

GIPSY GIRL

And stay in it all the time?

(*He nods.*)

I shouldn't like that a bit.

SCARECROW

Not even if you had a yellow dress and new shawl and all the ribbons you wanted?

GIPSY GIRL

But who would see them?

SCARECROW (*hopefully*)

Well, you see, *I* was counting on being there, too!

GIPSY GIRL (*shaking her head decidedly*)

Not for ten yellow dresses, but thanks for asking me just the same. It will make a good story to tell the rest to-night (*she moves off, still talking*)—how a Scarecrow asked me to m—— (*She laughs gayly as she goes out.*)

SCARECROW (*sadly*)

The same old story. I wonder I have the heart to go on trying. I do indeed.

(*There is silence for a little before a girl enters. She is poorly dressed in a faded blue cotton dress and apron, her feet are bare or in wooden shoes, and she wears a kerchief over her head. Over one arm she carries a basket into which she is picking berries.*)

SCARECROW (*politely*)

Good-day to you.

POLLY (*making a little countrified curtsy*)

Good-day to you.

SCARECROW

May I ask if you're bound for the Fair?

POLLY (*pointing to her bare feet and patched dress and sighing*)

Do I look as if I were, in these old clothes? No, I'm only picking blackberries.

SCARECROW (*hopefully*)

In that case maybe you wouldn't be above stopping to pass the time of day with me?

POLLY

I don't mind if I do, there's an hour yet before I must be back to milk the cow and start supper. (*She seats herself by the roadside.*)

SCARECROW

So you live hereabouts?

POLLY

Yes, I'm Farmer Jones's hired girl (*she sighs again*), but I didn't use to be.

SCARECROW (*sympathetically*)

Times have been hard for you, too, have they?

POLLY

It's been nothing but hard times ever since Granddaddy died. (*Pointing*) That's his old coat you've got on now.

SCARECROW (*surprised*)

You don't say so? Then you're—why you must be Old Man Mullins's granddaughter?

POLLY (*nodding*)

Yes, I'm Polly. (*Explaining*) When they sold the house and everything in it nobody wanted that old greatcoat and me, so Farmer Jones took us for nothing.

SCARECROW

I see. (*Curiously*) But why have you never come this way before?

POLLY

Well, you see (*hesitating*)—I'm sorry if I'm hurting your feelings, but I couldn't bear to see Granddaddy's coat out here on you, so I always went by the other road.

SCARECROW

Dear, dear, that's very sad. (*Thoughtfully*) It's a wonder your grandfather wouldn't leave you better off, seeing you were so fond of each other.

POLLY (*quickly*)

I'm sure he meant to. He always said he was saving to leave me a tidy little sum, but never a penny of it could be found.

SCARECROW (*his hand reaching for the inner pocket as he speaks*)

That's queer—maybe you didn't look in the right place.

POLLY

We searched high and low. (*Brightening*) I don't mind so much about the coat now

I know you get some comfort out of it. You're a nice scarecrow.

SCARECROW (*overcome*)

Do you really think so?

POLLY

Yes. (*Gathering up her things*) I guess I'd better be getting back.

SCARECROW

Oh, please stay a little longer. (*Explaining*) The reason I'm different from other scarecrows is because of my clothes.

POLLY (*wonderingly*)

Your clothes?

SCARECROW

Why, yes, what a scarecrow is like depends entirely on the clothes they give him when he's set out. Take me, now. I'm sentimental because of this waistcoat. Farmer Jones wore it the time he went courting his second wife, and so that's why I've got a heart and such an affectionate nature. And this hat (*he takes it off with a flourish*), it was the Doctor's and so, of course, that gave me ideas that just any common scarecrow wouldn't have.

POLLY (*admiringly*)

Think of that! Why, it's wonderful!

SCARECROW

Yes, but it's hard sometimes, when everyone treats you as if you were just sticks and straw.

POLLY (*turning to go*)

Well, good-bye, I'll be sure to remember.

SCARECROW (*pleading*)

Oh, you mustn't go yet. There's so much more I want to say to you.

POLLY

I'll come some other day.

SCARECROW (*his hand deep in the pocket*)

Please listen to me. (*With a great effort*) Polly, come close and put your hand where mine is.

POLLY

Next time.

SCARECROW

No, now—please. You see I thought it was mine. I did really, and I had hoped—— (*He breaks off and chokes back tears.*) But I'd be the last one to keep it from you.

POLLY (*stammering, and half drawing back*)
I don't understand you.

SCARECROW (*pulling out a bag of money*)
Here, then. Take it. It's yours.

POLLY (*wide-eyed*)
Why, if it isn't Granddaddy's old tobacco pouch!

SCARECROW (*thrusting it upon her*)
Look inside and you'll see what's in it.

POLLY (*opening it wonderingly*)
Oh, mercy on us, it's full as it can be of yellow money.

SCARECROW
It's your little fortune.

POLLY
Just to think of it—out here in the cornfield these three years. (*Hugging it to her breast joyfully*) Now I won't have to work for Farmer Jones and his wife any more, and I can have new shoes and a hat again. Why, I can go straight to the Fair this minute, can't I?

SCARECROW (*forlornly*)
Certainly, my dear. You're your own mistress now. (*With an effort*) Good-bye.

POLLY (*hurrying off in the opposite direction from the one she came from*)

Good-bye.

SCARECROW (*stands alone, very dejected*)

Well, here I am no better off, and Fair Day nearly over and no money bag in my pocket. (*With a tremendous sigh*) What chance is there for me now? None at all. (*Trying to take a livelier attitude*) Nothing to do but whistle to keep my spirits up again. (*He tries to, but fails.*) Heigh-ho. I shall end my days where I started them in this cornfield.

(*Suddenly Polly comes running back, breathless. She hurries up to him.*)

Well, what's the matter, Polly?

POLLY (*out of breath*)

I came back to say thank you. I was that flustered what with getting my fortune back, I clean forgot my manners.

SCARECROW (*pleased*)

It's not to be wondered at.

POLLY

Lots of scarecrows would have kept it and never said a word.

SCARECROW

I won't deny that.

POLLY (*coming up close to him*)

It was ever so kind of you (*putting her arm about him*). Do you know, I almost don't think you're funny-looking any more.

SCARECROW (*pleased*)

Don't you? (*She shakes her head.*) I don't suppose you—you could ever grow fond of me, not now you have a fortune and so many handsomer fellows ready to help you spend it?

POLLY (*dreamily*)

There's a little cottage across the fields that I've always fancied, but I wouldn't like to live in it all by myself.

SCARECROW (*hopefully*)

You wouldn't need anyone like me, would you? I have long wanted a wife and home of my own.

POLLY

Now I think of it, I'm really very much in need of a husband.

SCARECROW (*incredulously*)

Really? And would I do?

POLLY

If you're good at odd jobs?

SCARECROW

Just you try me and see.

POLLY

Well, then, let's hurry back and tell Farmer Jones.

SCARECROW

You'll have to kiss me first, I won't be able to move till you do.

(She stands beside him, puts both arms round his neck, and kisses him. Instantly a change comes over his whole body. The stiffness leaves him, he stretches his arms and legs, moves them gingerly at first, and then begins to caper all about her, his tatters flapping fantastically as he does so.)

SCARECROW

Look, look, Polly. I'm not a scarecrow any more. You've broken the spell, and we can live happily ever after.

POLLY *(in her most matter-of-fact tones)*

So we can, but not before you have some new clothes.

SCARECROW (*still capering about*)

Never mind that, just put a new patch in your granddaddy's greatcoat and it's good for another ten years. I wouldn't think of wearing any other after all the luck it's brought me.

POLLY (*taking his arm happily*)

Well, just as you say, dear.

(*They go skipping off together, Polly clasping the old tobacco pouch tight in one hand, while the other is in his. His rags and tatters flap gayly as they go off.*)

CURTAIN

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by Rachel Field

Ho, for taxis green or blue,
Hi, for taxis red,
They roll along the Avenue
Like spools of colored thread!

Jack-o'-Lantern yellow,
Orange as the moon,
Greener than the greenest grass
Ever grew in June.
Gayly striped or checked in squares,
Wheels that twinkle bright,
Don't you think that taxis make
A very pleasant sight?

Ho, for taxis red and green,
Hi, for taxis blue,
I wouldn't be a private car
In sober black, would you?

* * *

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